

This e-mail was sent by Frindle2u@aol.com after finding an interesting article on Town Online.

For all your local news from Eastern Massachusetts, along with insightful commentary, breaking news stories, local arts entertainment and sports from across Massachusetts and the nation, visit: <http://www.townonline.com>

Frindle2u@aol.com also included the following message:

Forming partnerships is key.

"News"

(Debbie Duggan)



SEMS DocID

605764

To read the full story and see photos, go to:

<http://www.townonline.com/northwest/wilmington/04494343.htm>

'A Civil Action' lawyer emphasizes involvement

By Susan Tordella

READING - Like Ulysses who returned home after a life-changing odyssey, Jan Schlichtmann came home to Massachusetts after recovering from the epic legal war he waged against Beatrice Foods and W.R. Grace from 1986 to 1995. What Schlichtmann recently discovered near his Beverly home revived the fighting spirit that carried him through the grueling case he fought on behalf of several Woburn families whose children had been stricken with leukemia. Wenham Lake, part of a watershed that supplies drinking water for 80,000 people in Beverly, Salem and parts of Wenham, floats over soil polluted with heavy metals. He told an audience of 225 in the Parker Middle School in Reading on Jan. 26, a group that included several environmental activists from Wilmington, that acres of toxic coal ash dumped in the Fly Ash landfill adjacent to the lake, had spread throughout the lake and tributaries. "I learned in Woburn, it can travel a very long way." Through a series of tests conducted this month

and in November 2000, Schlichtmann has found near his own backyard, what he wanted to forget. "I would prefer to come home and play with my kids and forget about it," he said afterwards. Schlichtmann said he lived in Beverly for four years without knowing the source of his drinking water. Townspeople had encouraged him to research the situation, and he had procrastinated. Schlichtmann said he got angry upon learning the extent of the pollution. "I got very angry. It was one of those days when I had to relive it all again." Instead of initiating a multi-million dollar lawsuit against the suspected polluters, Schlichtmann told the audience he has a more effective tactic - building partnerships between the governments, community, companies involved, experts, investigators and lawyers. "If you're not a partner in the process, it's not going to happen. If you have any doubts, call the folks in Woburn," he said, some of whom were in the audience. The truth can be defined! through such relationships, he said. The newly formed Wenham Lake Watershed Association already boasts 300 members and a comprehensive Web site (wlwa.org). Their mission is to cleanup and protect the water supply through cooperation. Schlichtmann called the law too blunt of an instrument to resolve some conflicts. "It should not be a knife, but a scalpel, to be used as a healer." The dull and cumbersome legal process can obscure the facts of a case. "It's the lies, the Woburn families taught me, that will kill you," Schlichtmann said. "You can't give a lie to another generation. There can only be another generation if you give them the truth." Schlichtmann has rebuilt his life since the case that made him and Woburn famous in the book and movie entitled "A Civil Action." "Everyone was challenged by Woburn. You were defined by the choices you made. Who you are, what you are and what you stand for - Woburn helped you find out." Schlichtmann discovered he was will!

ing to sacrifice everything - integrity, sanity, money, possessions and

well-being - in a single-minded focus to bring out the truth about the pollution to the city's G and H wells. " I certainly wouldn't rely on the laws of civil procedure to discover the truth, " he said. In the nine years of litigation, the families were never permitted to tell their story directly to a jury. " Woburn mothers can tell you how hard it is to speak the truth. " In 1996, the Environmental Protection Agency finally admitted that the water in wells G and H were polluted by trichloroethylene and the substance was harmful to humans, even in small amounts. In the 1980s, the federal government had studied the water and declared it safe. Leaders in the city at the time concurred. " The mayor immediately said the water was okay, " Schlichtmann said. A public hearing was held where the public could not speak, he added. For effect, Schlichtmann repeatedly sipped bottled water during his 45-minute lect!

ure. " My journey to Woburn has taught me how profoundly our health can be effected by our water - tiny amounts [of pollution] break the strand of life, " he said. When asked during the 45-minute question and answer period if he would go through the life-changing journey again, Schlichtmann said " Yes. " Throughout the talk he reflected on the impact of the Woburn case on his life. After the final verdict, which ruled in favor of the defendants, Schlichtmann retreated to Hawaii, near destitute, to recover. " All I could see was the failure and the pain. " From the failure and pain, he has been reborn - stronger and wiser. He calls the odyssey " good therapy " and a " learning experience. " The case has provided inspiration to people nationwide in about 600 instances of environmental pollution. Schlichtmann's expertise and fame have put him in high demand to resolve conflict at high-profile sites in Toms River in New Jersey, Florida and Kentucky. In the wake of the success from the book and movie, Schlichtmann said his telephone began ringing. " Always on a Sunday - from a mother - it always is. "